

April 8, 2015

Dear Members of the Stanford Community:

I am writing to provide you with the report, being released today, of the Provost's Task Force on Sexual Assault Policies and Practices. This report is the culmination of months of work by an 18-member task force of students, faculty, staff and an alum. I convened the group last summer to review Stanford's policies and practices with respect to sexual assault, relationship violence and other conduct prohibited by Title IX and to identify how we can improve our efforts.

While the report is focused on the student experience, these issues are important to the entire Stanford community, so I wanted to provide broad access to the report immediately upon its release. You can find the report online at https://notalone.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/provost_task_force_report.pdf and a Q&A with the co-chairs of the task force at <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2015/april/task-force-qanda-040815.html>.

Sexual violence continues to occur far too frequently in our society. Colleges and universities across the nation are devoting great attention to reducing its occurrence in their own communities, and rightly so. This issue is fundamentally about ensuring a safe environment for all students, one in which everyone can take full advantage of the opportunities available to them. We have made a great deal of progress at Stanford over the last several years, but the task force report confirms there is more still to do.

Awareness and prevention are our highest priorities. We must build a culture, on our own campus and in the broader society, genuinely rooted in the concept of mutual respect. Our community should not be guided simply by rules and punishments, but by a shared sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the essential human dignity of each individual with whom we interact.

In addition to awareness and prevention, we must have university processes that are effective and fair. We must provide support to victims of sexual assault and relationship violence in a manner that is responsive, sensitive and easy to navigate. We also must have investigative and disciplinary procedures that respect the rights of all individuals involved, that ensure a careful hearing of all issues, and that guarantee fundamental fairness for all participants.

The task force has thought deeply about these issues and has consulted broadly with the campus community. They convened more than 80 meetings and town halls to gather input and advice. They have sought ways to build on the steps Stanford has taken in recent years and to identify candidly where our efforts can be improved.

The recommendations of the task force include:

Expanded education for students, faculty and staff on sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking and relationship violence; better dissemination of contact information about campus resources for these issues; and more support for research and educational programming on sexual violence.

Establishment of a Confidential Support and Response Team to provide a coordinated response for students who may have experienced an incident of sexual misconduct. This team of confidential counselors will provide a series of coordinated services currently distributed among different offices, including crisis response, helping students understand reporting options and resources available to them, and arranging ongoing support for all parties involved.

A new pilot process for investigating and adjudicating alleged incidents of sexual misconduct. The task force envisions a single, streamlined process that extends from the Title IX investigation to the disciplinary hearing, where necessary, to maximize consistency and minimize procedural delays. This pilot process would be evaluated over a several-year period.

New standards for the disciplinary hearing process. Three-member panels would hear cases and issue sanctions; panels would be drawn from a highly trained pool of faculty, staff and possibly graduate students; appeals would be heard by experienced former members of the pool. Expulsion would be the expected sanction for sexual assault, as it is defined in university policy, provided the panel is unanimous in its finding and sanction. The task force also recommends that the university explore possible options for helping students access legal assistance if they wish to have it.

I welcome the thoughtful recommendations of the task force and intend to implement as many as possible for the coming academic year. Within the month, I will form two implementation teams: one focused on education and support systems, and one focused on investigation and adjudication. In some places, the task force has identified issues for further consideration, and we will be reviewing those as well.

I want to thank the members of the task force, led by co-chairs M. Elizabeth Magill, dean of Stanford Law School, and Elizabeth Woodson, who is completing her term as 2014-15 ASSU president, for the tremendous amount of time and energy they have committed to the work of the task force. Their report makes an immense contribution to our efforts to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all members of our campus community.

Sincerely,

John Etchemendy
Provost